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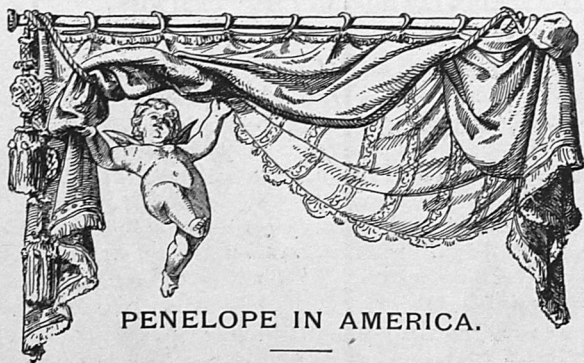
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PENELOPE IN AMERICA.

BY CLARENCE COOK.

WHEN we consider the pleasure that women in all ages of the world have taken in the labors of the loom and in the work of the needle, it seems not a little strange that our American women should have shown so little interest in the arts of embroidery and weaving. It is true that of late years embroidery has been spasmodically taken up as a pastime by numberless women, and every few months some new exercise for the needle or the knitting needle is introduced—an invention or a revival—and thousands of female heads and hands are set at work manufacturing.

Lace of all sorts and lovelier than their names "Macromé" or "torchon" or "Tak" or "Cluny," or in embroidering designs out of some one else's head, with some one of the hundred stitches that rise from time to time to dispute the supremacy of the Kensington, that, no doubt, very useful but very hum-drum invention for getting over the ground.

But with all this fury of "decorative" industry, it is surprising how little original work has been produced among us, how little translation of other people's ideas into an individual expression. Mrs. Holmes has, it is true, struck out a path of her own, and has shown not a little pictorial power in the landscapes she has painted with her needle. But, however striking are the effects she produces, and however ingenious her technical methods, it may be questioned with some show of reason whether this is really embroidery. Is it, in fact, anything more than painting, and realistic painting, not imaginative painting at that? There is nothing conventional in Mrs. Holmes' work—no more in the conception of her pictures than in the mechanical means she employs to carry out those conceptions. It would seem as if she felt that there is too much art in the general run of painted landscapes, whether the pictures are "high" art or "low" art, whether they represent in their tameness the "Hudson River" school, or in their aspiration aim at "Art for Art's sake." This artist wanted to get as near the actual effect, the real look of nature, as she could, and we are at liberty to suppose, without really knowing anything about the matter, that she felt the possibility of getting nearer to the expression of the actual facts with her silks and crewels than she could were she to employ the ordinary materials of the artist. And there is no doubt that with her grounds of shaded silk, her wools and silks of all twists and sizes and infinite in variety of graded dyes, together with an absolute freedom in the employment of any existing stitch that would serve her turn, or in the invention of any new stitches where the old would not answer, her cunning hand and ingenious wits produced effects never obtained, so far as my observation goes, with oil colors or with water colors. Sunsets, snow-fields, stretches of water, fleecy clouds seemed not so much to be painted on her canvases as to be really present before our eyes; we looked at them out of some "charmed magic casement," and almost believed in them while we looked.

Such work as this, beautiful as it was, and exceptionally ingenious, was, however, purely individual, and could only suffer in the hands of imitators. And, in fact, there was danger at one time that imitators would appear in plenty,

following the lead of one clever copyist. But Mrs. Holmes had always shunned the public; her pictures had only been painted to please herself and to give pleasure to her friends, and so, after once exhibiting them, urged by a general curiosity, they were withdrawn, and so few people had seen them that we escaped the danger of their becoming "the fashion."

The only serious movement that has been made toward establishing among us a school of embroidery worthy the name, is that originated by Mrs. Candace Wheeler—at first in connection with the Ladies' Decorative Art Society, then as Head of the Embroidery Department of the Society of Associated Artists, and at present in control of a business, for to that proportion has it grown in her able and energetic hands, carried on by herself alone.

It is now, however, as a business, that I am interested in Mrs. Wheeler's work, but only in so far as that work is developing among us a taste for an art which is worthy of the high esteem it has enjoyed among all civilized people, East and West, since the earliest times. It was necessary for its success that this new enterprise should be taken up by a woman, but the right kind of woman was not so easy to meet with. In Mrs. Wheeler three things met. A large-hearted woman—she wanted to help young girls who desired to be employed in work that they could enjoy, and which at the same time would give them a fair return for their labor. It was not merely to give them work, that the benevolent societies are always doing to the extent of their ability, but it

concerns all of us who are interested in the establishment and growth of the arts of life here in America, has been that in the Department of Embroidery there has been laid the foundation for a school which has already produced good fruit with a distinct American flavor of its own, grafted on our native stock, and not recalling the art of any other country except as all art is related to what has gone before.

And Mrs. Wheeler's third qualification for her work is, that she herself is an artist, and that it is her love of art and her capacity for it which have incited her to her undertaking. A love of doing good is one thing, and business faculty is one thing, but in such an enterprise, the main thing after all must be a love of art and a capacity for it, not only the perception of what is good in color and composition, but the practical power to carry out in practice what exists in the mind. From this establishment have gone out embroideries which, for design and execution, have not been excelled in our time, and which, like all good things in the arts, rest on a solid basis of popular approval, to which the professional approval of artists themselves only gives the stamp of authority—is not the real proof of excellence. Of course, to accomplish what has been done, Mrs. Wheeler must have had able helpers, and she has found them in her accomplished daughter Miss Dora Wheeler, who has made a distinct mark in the history of our contemporary art, more particularly as applied to decoration, and in Miss Townsend, who has produced some flower designs that would not be shamed by hanging side by side with the best Oriental work.

Nor should it be forgotten that a great improvement in the texture and in the dyes of American silks has been one important result of Mrs. Wheeler's enterprise. Aided by the spirited and sympathetic heads of the Cheney Silk Manufacturing Company, a great many experiments have been tried, at Mrs. Wheeler's suggestion, in the weaving and dyeing of the stuffs used as grounds for the embroideries, and it is not brag, but simple fact, that results have been reached which ought to convince the most skeptical of our ability to produce the finest fabrics here at home. It is no wonder that English people seeing these artistic productions, so rich and free in design, and so finished in execution, are refreshed by the contrast with much of the conventional work produced at home, and are ordering these embroideries for their London drawing-rooms.

It is true the arts are of no nation, but an American may be greatly pleased to find Mr. Ruskin lecturing upon the work of an American girl at Oxford, and the first new path that has been struck out in embroidery in modern times, pioneered by the taste, the ingenuity, and the indomitable energy of an American woman.

#### COLORING WALLS.

THE best preparation for distemper is a thin flat coat of paint. The walls should at first be sized with a mixture made of soap, alum, and a little glue, tinting the size or paint to color, if dark colors are to be used or the wall is rough, as church walls are. The distemper itself should never be put on in more than one coat, as it tends to peel if thick. The glue should be covered with water, allowed to stand over night, the non-absorbed water poured off, and the glue melted. The color, made up of pigment and fine whiting or Paris white (or zinc white for very fine work) to a paste, is now mixed with the glue and applied cool. An absorbent wall requires, of course, a larger quantity of water. If oil be used the wall should be primed or sized. The first coat ought to be of white lead, mixed with plenty of oil, a little japan, and some turpentine. The fourth or last coat should be made flat, well thinned with turpentine, but possess the full color intended. It is stated that the surface thus produced will bear cleaning with a damp cloth, although it contains little exposed oil. For church walls a rough floated surface is best for distemper.—*The Painter.*



SUMMER.

was to give them work that would educate their faculties and lift them up, and by sensible, practical methods in dealing with the crowd of applicants, the wheat was sifted from the chaff and a good working staff was secured, for which recruits are never long to seek.

Mrs. Wheeler's next qualification for the work she had in hand was a clear business head and an eye steadily fixed on her well-understood purpose. As there was nothing frivolous nor fanciful in her design, so there has been nothing of hesitation or vacillation in her methods, and the result, which